

SECTION

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Introduction

Overview of the County Trails Program

San Diego County is located in the most southwestern tip of California bordering Mexico to the South, Orange and Riverside Counties to the North, Imperial County to the East and the Pacific Ocean to the West. It covers approximately 4,261 square miles, 65 miles from north to south and 86 miles from east to west. Eighteen incorporated areas or cities are located within San Diego County, making it the second most populous county in California and sixteenth nationwide.

San Diego County contains hundreds of miles of shoreline, coastal canyons, rolling foothills and rugged mountains, streams, rivers and lakes, and even a vast expanse of desert, all capable of being reached by vehicular travel in a few hours. The unincorporated County comprises 84 percent of the land area and contains an array of impressive landscapes. Unique opportunities are available to satisfy the needs and

demand for non-motorized trails generated by various trail user groups, including walkers, hikers, mountain bicyclists, and equestrians within the County boundary.

The Trail System Assessment (TSA) found existing trail opportunities in San Diego County are varied and showcase the diverse scenery of the many parks, open spaces, cultural resources, and wilderness areas of the region. The region is graced with nearly ideal weather for trail activities on most days of the year. County residents have access to a wide variety of trail opportunities from coastal boardwalks, to nature trails in city and county parks, to secluded trails up high mountain peaks and through remote desert lands.

Countywide there are over 1,400 miles of existing trails. However, the majority of the trails are in the less densely populated eastern half of the County. Additional trails

are needed closer to population centers in the western portion of the County so more residents have convenient access and can enjoy the recreation, health, and transportation benefits of trails.

1.1 Overview of the Community Trails Master Plan (CTMP)

The Scope

The scope of the Community Trails Master Plan (CTMP) includes the entire unincorporated portion of the County of San Diego. The unincorporated area is divided into Community/Subregional Plan Areas (**Figure IT-1**). Benefits of the CTMP include flexibility that allows communities to amend their individual trail plans to accommodate changing needs or adjust for new trail opportunities without having to amend the County General Plan. The CTMP provides community-based, bottoms-up development to encourage community involvement and to allow them to tailor-fit their plan to the unique characteristics, desires, and vision for local trail networks in their community. While there may be a need for additional trails in many areas of the County, communities participating in this CTMP are doing so because they have reached a consensus on the importance of recreational trails in their area and have

expended considerable time and effort in formulating community trail plans.

The Purpose

The purpose of the CTMP is to guide community trail development and management in the unincorporated County. It also incorporates the concept of pathways (trails within public road rights-of-way) and describes them as an integral part of many community trail systems. Countywide aspects of the CTMP, including trail types, design and management guidelines, and implementation strategies were developed by a Trails Program Management Team (TPMT). The TPMT consists of combined staff from three County Departments: Parks and Recreation, Planning and Land Use, and Public Works.

Participating communities developed their individual sections of the plan with guidance from the County in the form of outreach materials and suggested trail types and design guidelines. In most cases, community planning or sponsor groups, or their respective trails subcommittees developed the trail maps and any customized trail design guidelines, community-specific goals, policies, or implementation strategies. These groups also went through a process of assigning names, priority status, and mileage to their trails.

Management

This Master Plan describes how trails will be managed by three County Departments—Parks and Recreation, Planning and Land Use and Public Works. The CTMP describes specific roles and responsibilities of each department, with the Department of Parks and Recreation having primary administrative oversight. The plan also describes the level of demand for trails in San Diego County and delineates how a baseline, defined as a minimum level of service, can be applied to trail implementation activities with a goal of meeting existing and future trail needs through the year 2020 and beyond. It provides detailed guidelines for trail types and trail construction specifications. It discusses optimal trail design features and summarizes important issues that should be considered when developing trails including location, general alignments, acquisition, easements, liability, cultural and natural resources, trail experience, accessibility, and safety. It also describes the process for amending the master plan, provides for community input into future changes, and describes how non-participating communities can participate in the CTMP in the future.

Factors influencing implementation of the CTMP, such as staffing, funding, costs, resource allocation and phasing are addressed in a separate implementation document. That document also addresses issues such as prioritization of funds,

acquisition strategies, and sequential steps for programmatic growth.

Figure IT-1: Community/Subregional Plan Areas of the County of San Diego

